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Environmental stress factors in special education and regular education : recommendations for recruitment/retention

Carole Marie Styczynski Hersom
San Jose State University

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education: Recommendations for recruitment/retention**

Hersom, Carole Marie Styczynski, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1993

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106

ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS FACTORS IN
SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REGULAR EDUCATION:
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Division of Special Education
and Rehabilitative Services
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Master of Arts

By

Carole Marie Styczynski Hersom

May, 1993

APPROVED FOR THE DIVISION OF SPECIAL
EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

Mary Male
Mary Male, Ph.D.

PeggyAnn Reed
PeggyAnn Reed, MA

Janice M. Howard
Janice M. Howard, MA

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

M. Lou Lewandowski

ABSTRACT

ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS FACTORS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REGULAR EDUCATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

by Carole Marie Styczynski Hersom

This thesis seeks to identify the environmental stress factors that exist in the teaching profession. Comparisons were made using T scores of levels of significance between these factors for special education teachers and regular education teachers.

Three environmental factors out of 16 offered a level of significance between special and regular education teachers: 1) the paperwork required by the district, state, and federal governments, 2) ambiguous policies from the administration, and 3) lack of help and support from the administration. In addition, open-ended statements also pinpoint the administration as being the cause of additional stress in other areas.

Recommendations for alleviation of these stress factors were offered to help recruit and retain teachers in the field of secondary special education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a stressful occupation. Teaching special education high school students can be especially stressful. According to Kaiser and Polczynski (1982), stress can be partially explained by the teacher experiencing conflict between the need to help students learn and achieve, and the need for organizational policies and procedures that maintain the school structure. Burnout has been found to occur most often in people-oriented occupations and in those people who are the most idealistic (Retish, 1986).

Special educators are not immune to the burnout phenomena. Teachers working with handicapped children face extra responsibilities and pressures, such as the challenges of individualizing educational plans, meeting timelines, and finding themselves in adversarial roles with parents (Shaw, Bensky, Dixon, & Bonneau, 1980). Three environmental factors--lack of administrative support, uncooperative regular education teachers, and lack of planning time--along with the additional aspects of better room accommodations and the need for more parent involvement are all items special educators would like to see changed (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). Add the human factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization,

and lack of personal accomplishment that are accompanied by indicators of physical and psychological stress which may lead to distancing from clients, diminished work performance, increased absenteeism, and high attrition (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Zabel & Zabel, 1982).

Much research has been done about reducing stress in the workplace. Strategies to cope with stress are available to those who seek them. If change is to occur, "it becomes clear that improving the teaching career can be accomplished within the profession with the cooperation of teachers and administrators" (Metzke, 1988, p. 110). But some of the stress-producing factors that exist in a high school cannot be changed.

In special education, teaching positions are abundant, especially at the secondary level. Many teachers enter special education as a means of achieving employment in the district. As soon as an opening becomes available in the mainstream, an escape is made in order to try something new, stimulating, and more rewarding. In a study conducted in Wisconsin, the number of special education teachers who transferred to regular education was twice that of regular education teachers who transferred to special education (Metzke, 1988). In that same study, the attrition rate of special educators

was found to be twice as great as that of teachers in regular education.

Of equal importance to consider are those special education teachers who suffer from extreme stress, but do not leave the teaching profession. These teachers can eventually suffer what is termed "burnout." A teacher suffering from burnout distances himself from his students and has a lowered tolerance for frustrating events. Unfortunately, the student population served by special educators are students with emotional problems, learning difficulties, mental deficiencies, and attentional deficiencies (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983; Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). These types of students require teachers who possess a nurturing, tolerant disposition.

Several variables have been identified as causes of stress, burnout, and attrition of special education teachers. The causes can be sorted into several categories: self, other teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, and community (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). The "Self" category includes little opportunity for recognition, promotion, or advancement (Fimian & Santoro, 1983), insufficient physical activity --exercise-- (Bradfield & Fones, 1985), and insufficient time management skills (Raschke, Dedrick & DeVries, 1988). Perceived role conflict and ambiguity (Crane &

Iwanicki, 1986) are additional sources of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The personal issues and lifestyle of the individual teacher also affect job satisfaction.

The "Other Teachers" category includes isolation from fellow teachers (Beasley, Myette & Serna, 1983) and lack of team development (Swick, 1989). Support staff and administrators are responsible for inappropriate student placements, excessive paperwork (Faas, 1984), lack of age-appropriate instructional materials, classroom allocations, lack of job stability and continuity, and finally, a salary commensurate with the amount of training (Olson & Matuskey, 1982).

Parents are apathetic (Beasley et al., 1983). The community seemingly provides little or no support for teachers who are working with a transitory, urban population. Popular notion has it that more and more teachers are being placed in the role of not only meeting the educational needs but also the emotional needs of their students (Dedrick, Hawkes & Smith, 1981), when at times the familial needs are not being met at home or in the community.

It is the intention of this study to examine the environmental stress factors for special and regular education teachers and to determine whether differences

do exist and, if so, why. Recommendations will be offered to encourage the special education teachers already employed by the district to remain in special education. In addition, if the district can make special education an attractive area for new teachers to gain employment, the shortage of qualified teachers to teach in this specialized area might be alleviated. As a result, the district would not have to pay to have teachers earn the required credentialing to meet state mandates in these times of budget crises.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to survey a high school district and the entire certificated staff at one of the high schools in that same district to provide information and recommendations to the district and the administrative staffs of each school, regarding the stress and burnout of special education teachers. With this information, changes to stem the flow of qualified special educators out of the profession can occur.

Hypothesis

Null hypothesis. There will be no significant difference between any of the environmental stress factors experienced by regular education teachers and special education teachers.

Definitions

The following words and phrases will be used:

Burnout. A term broadly describing any negative response by a person to work-related stress (Blase, 1982).

County Assisted AB65 Reading, Writing, and Math Tests. A differential standard which represents a change in the content, level of difficulty, or method of administration of a proficiency test. These tests may be given to students enrolled in special education programs and who have diagnosed learning handicaps or disabilities such that the individualized program team determines that they have not demonstrated evidence of the ability to attain the district's regular proficiency standards with appropriate educational services and support.

Formal Testing (Assessment). Assessment procedures that contain specific rules for administration, scoring, and interpretation; generally norm-referenced and/or standardized (McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986).

Individual Educational Program (IEP). Written document required by federal law to detail the year's plan for every handicapped child; includes statements of present performance, annual goals, short-term instructional objectives, specific educational services needed, relevant dates, regular education program

participation, and evaluation procedures; must be signed by parents as well as educational personnel (Heward & Orlansky, 1984).

Informal Testing (Assessment). Assessment procedures without rigid administration, scoring, and interpretation rules; includes criterion-referenced tests, task analysis, inventories, etc. (McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986).

Interim Administrative Placement. Allows student to be placed in a comparable program for a period of time not to exceed 30 calendar days, when transferring from outside the local service area.

Learning Disabilities (LD). Term meant to identify children with a severe discrepancy between potential or ability and actual achievement (Heward & Orlansky, 1984).

Learning Handicapped Specialist. Credential issued by the State of California that authorizes the holder to teach handicapped children in a special class in which the primary disabilities "specific learning disability" or "mentally retarded (mild)" in grades twelve and below, including preschool, and in classes organized primarily for adults.

Mainstreaming. Refers to the return to the regular classroom for all or part of the school day, of exceptional children previously educated exclusively in

segregated (self-contained) settings (Heward & Orlansky, 1984).

Minimum Proficiency Requirements. Basic skill standards in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematical computation necessary to success in school and life experiences that must be met for students to graduate from high school.

Regular Education Teacher. Teacher serving the needs of students in the mainstream (Metzke, 1988).

Resource Specialist Program (RSP). Designed to provide service to students whose needs have been identified in an IEP developed by the IEP team and who are assigned to regular classroom teachers for a majority of a school day.

Special Day Class (SDC). A special education administrative arrangement characterized by a smaller pupil/teacher ratio to which children are assigned on the basis of a disability label (e.g., EMR, learning-disabled). Usually the group is kept within a range of two or four years and the teacher has specialized training in instructing children with a specific disability (MacMillan, 1982).

Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). A regional area consisting of elementary and secondary school districts. SELPA has qualified personnel

available to implement the program and to provide related services as identified on each IEP. It utilizes a multidisciplinary assessment approach to assure that all pupils receive full educational opportunities regardless of the district of residence.

Special Education Teacher. Teacher who teaches in categorical programs serving identified handicapped children (Metzke, 1988).

Stress. A process that carries both positive and negative potential as determined by the individual's perceptual and behavioral orientation (Swick, 1989).

Teacher Attrition. Number of teachers who leave the field of education (Metzke, 1988).

Teacher Retention. The ability to keep teachers in the classroom (Metzke, 1988).

Limitations and Assumptions

The limiting factors that may affect the answers received are as follows:

1. Teachers in Santa Clara County may be different than teachers in other areas.
2. Teachers may not respond honestly.
3. Teachers may be too stressed to deal with a survey on stress.
4. Teachers may fear reprisal for their answers.
5. Teachers may be unsure of the use of information and

be concerned about confidentiality.

6. Unavailability of teachers who have left education to respond to survey.
7. Surveying a small portion of teachers in a large urban area.
8. The construction of the survey may affect the responses.
9. Responses received may be affected by the time of the year the survey is administered.

The following assumptions are being made about the administration of the survey:

1. A majority of the teachers surveyed will respond.
2. Teachers will be honest in their answers.
3. Teachers will give suggestions on how to alleviate their perceived stress.
4. Special education teachers have different stressors than regular education teachers have.
5. The survey will produce the needed information to support the purpose of this study.

Summary

Because of job factors specific to special education, this researcher will examine environmental stress factors as they relate to special education teachers and regular education teachers. Chapter Two will concentrate on a review of the literature pertaining

to stress and burnout and the factors pertinent to that topic. Chapter Three will set forth the parameters of the study and the means by which it will be accomplished. Chapter Four will present the collected data. Finally, Chapter Five will set forth the findings of the study and any recommendations that might prove useful to high school and district administrators.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since special education teacher stress factors appear to be of more significance than those experienced by regular education teachers, it is the purpose of this research to compare and contrast the differences between environmental stress factors and offer recommendations to bring about change.

Students with learning disabilities, who are placed in a special day class (SDC) with diverse needs, make this group stressful to teach (Crane & Iwanicki, 1986). According to Lerner (1985), additional complications at the secondary level stem from the unique characteristics of the learning-disabled adolescent: the turmoil and dissonance that accompanies puberty; the years of failure, low self-esteem, poor motivation, and inadequate peer acceptance; and the disruptive and maladaptive behavior. For the adolescent, behavioral and social problems often take precedence over learning problems. Learning-disabled adolescents are often characterized by avoidance of tasks, impulsivity, emotional swings, overreaction, disorganized study habits, poor use of time, and lack of attention.

For discussion purposes, stressors can be divided into three categories as presented in Chapter One:

"Self," the personal and job-related factors affecting the teacher; "Parents and Community," the contact people outside the school; and, "School Environment," other teachers, support staff, and administrators with whom the teacher must have contact with on a daily basis. Since some of these categories greatly affect teachers personally, or at the "Self" level, an overlap of topics may occur, thus accounting for the majority of information occurring in that first topic.

Self

California law requires that all high school students enrolled in a four year program pass minimum proficiency requirements in order to receive a high school diploma. In the East Side Union High School District, these tests are the AB 65 Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Tests.

Since all students are required to take these tests, special education teachers feel compelled to include in their course of study instruction designed to help their students with material that they will encounter on these tests. Unfortunately, most students in special day classes are not able to pass basic minimum proficiencies that have been set as graduation standards. After four years of taking and failing the AB 65 Tests, students may then take County Assisted AB 65 Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Tests. As a result of this concentration on

meeting the basic competency requirements, many students in special education do not receive knowledge of basic life skills needed to survive as adults. Consequently, teachers are left feeling frustrated, because their students are not being successful on the basic competency tests and are not being taught basic survival skills.

Schwab (1984) points out that teachers enter the profession not for high salaries but for the opportunity to help students. "Psychological income" is the term Dedrick et al., (1981) used to describe why professionals choose teaching and why financial concerns were not a deep-rooted source of stress. Thus, professional image is closely linked to the progress made by students (Lottie, 1975). It is important to realize that special educators work with students who have impaired abilities; consequently, the gains they observe might be relatively small compared to those of other student populations (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). Many teachers come away from their job with feelings of futility and lack of accomplishment. The missing elements of instructional success and noticeable student progress contribute to the fact teachers in high school districts leave the profession at a higher rate than do regular education teachers in the same districts.

Role clarity and discrepancy between the teacher's perception of the role and others' expectation of the teacher's role lead to the development of stress (Bensky, Shaw, Gouse, Bates, Dixon, & Beane, 1980). Metzke (1988) concluded in her study done in Wisconsin that attrition rates of secondary school teachers is significantly higher than the attrition rates of middle and elementary teachers surveyed.

In special education, teaching positions are abundant, especially at the secondary level. Overall, as a group, senior high school teachers are more likely to think of a career change (72%) as opposed to the responses of a mixed group of teachers, 57% of whom considered a career change in a study conducted by Dedrick et al., (1981). Many teachers enter special education as a means of achieving employment in a district. As soon as an opening becomes available in the mainstream, an escape is made in order to try something new, stimulating, and more rewarding (Chandler, 1983). During a teaching career specific times exist when the possibility of stress occurring is higher than at other times, especially the first five years of teaching and after 15 years, according to Retish (1986).

Many people who want mainstream teaching jobs, but have been unable to secure them due to a lack of openings

in certain areas, find employment teaching in this specialized field. Divorced and married women who possess a basic teaching credential find themselves needing employment. Teaching allows them the flexibility to raise their families (summers and holidays off) and utilizes a basic skill they have developed, nurturing and caring for others (Needle, Griffin, Svendsen & Berney, 1980).

Special education requires this kind of care and nurturing ability. Many of the special needs students who are serviced by the high schools come from dysfunctional families. Empathy, understanding, and guidance can be offered by teachers who have experienced similar situations in their own lives. However, this involvement can be detrimental to the teacher if the stress on the job and at home are too intense, and no relief exists (Raschke et al., 1988). Burnout due to stress can ultimately affect not only the teacher, but the student. A teacher under stress is concerned with survival and this may take precedence over instructional activities (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983).

Metzke (1988) found that teachers with 5 or fewer years experience are more likely to leave teaching than teachers with six or more years of experience. In the same study done in Wisconsin, the number of special education teachers who transferred to regular education is

twice that of regular education teachers who transferred to special education. The average length of time a teacher remains in special education is 7.5 years. Since a teacher shortage exists in special education, incentive programs that will encourage them to stay in special education and not leave for regular education need to be developed (Metzke, 1988).

Exercise and personal time are important ways of reducing stress and pressure (Kaiser & Polczynski, 1982). Most women handling a career, education, and a family find little time for these needed stress relievers. Besides taking its toll monetarily, physically, and mentally, lack of time or time management problems are issues that require attention. Lack of exercise has been found to be a factor associated with stress. The number of work days missed by teachers in high stress groups is higher than that of low stress groups, thus costing the taxpayers millions of dollars each year (Bradfield & Fones, 1985).

The learning handicapped credential requires an additional 36 units of work at San Jose State University. The resource specialist certificate is an additional six units added to the above. With 42 units in addition to the basic credential of 30 units, a learning handicapped specialist receives pay equivalent to other high school teachers. This training is required by California law to

teach in this capacity. Most university master's programs require 30 units of graduate level work. A qualified learning handicapped teacher possesses 72 units above a bachelor of arts or science degree, but still does not have the equivalent of a master's degree.

Even though California law requires this additional training, school districts, because of contractual obligations and budget problems, provide no financial incentives to retain teachers in special education. Coupled with the other factors already discussed "somewhere between fifteen hundred and two thousand highly trained special education teachers in California will leave the profession in the near future at least in part because of the high levels of stress which they are experiencing on the job and in their lives in general" (Bradfield & Fones, 1985, p. 94). Middle and secondary school level positions are the hardest to fill and maintain.

The lack of job continuity and stability (Needle et al., 1980) are issues for teachers who have not received tenure, especially in these economic times. By March 15th of each year, a school district must notify all temporary personnel that they may not have jobs in September. If a teacher is in the process of working on a learning handicapped credential and has invested time and money,

receiving such a letter can also cause additional stress and worry.

Once a teacher has been granted tenure, what that teacher will be teaching, especially at the high school level, is subject to change annually. Teachers leave, new teachers arrive, teachers move partially or completely out into the mainstream, and administration makes its changes to accommodate budget and schedule constraints (Kaiser & Polczynski, 1982). An environment of uncertainty and discontent is created. In many cases, a special education teacher does not know his or her teaching assignment until a few days before school starts in September.

Not knowing what one will teach allows for little advance planning. Materials to be used in the classroom usually are ordered in the spring before school is let out for the year. If materials are ordered by one teacher, another teacher may have to incorporate them into her lesson plans if teaching assignments are altered. This can result in waste of budget funds and taxpayers' money. Because funding for special education comes from sources other than regular education, access to textbooks, computers, and other materials is limited. Other departments on campus may be unwilling to share, because of prejudices against special education.

Classroom assignments are haphazard and a teacher may have to teach classes in four different classrooms. Transferring and storage of materials becomes a problem. Having a place to call one's own, decorate, and be proud of is important to the morale of a teacher.

The opportunity for advancement is slim (Jones, 1987). Department chairperson and district special services are possibilities, but involve little increase in pay for the additional work involved. People take these jobs to get out of the classroom, again affecting the number of qualified people available to teach in special education. Others may go back to school to obtain counseling or administrative credentials as a way out of an uncomfortable situation. Maslach and Jackson (1981) concluded that burnout is composed of three aspects--- emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Parents and Community

Since the East Side Union High School District is located in the high technology area of Santa Clara Valley, student population is extremely varied and transient. Family structure and function are inherently different for various cultural and ethnic groups. Some students are from foster and group home placements. Others have been in juvenile hall, spent time at a youth detention

facility, and may have a probation officer. They usually attend a particular school for a short period of time and then move or are transferred to another school for disciplinary reasons. Single parents, stepfamilies, and grandparents are predominant caregivers. In the district boundaries, family economics and education range from very low to very high.

Lack of attendance and dropout rates, 40% for the high school district, are high. The amount of family support and ability to cope with teenagers varies. Alcohol, drugs, and crime have their effect on the students. When contact is made with the parents concerning their student, the home support is sometimes there, but is usually very little, if any at all. The severity of learning and behavioral problems in inner city special education classes could explain the higher levels of stress among those teachers (Crane & Iwanicki, 1986).

Since a transitory population exists, many special education students new to the district enter school on an interim administrative placement. These students have a current IEP or have been deemed eligible for special educational services. The parent or agency enrolling the student usually does not have a copy of the IEP, so one must be obtained from the former school. The IEP specifies what the student needs. Without the IEP, the

services provided may not be adequate. By the time the IEP arrives or formal testing can be completed, much time may have passed. Teachers have to do their best with informal testing and observations and teacher-made tests in order to provide the student with an appropriate education. The student often moves on to another school, again to repeat the process, thus receiving education without the continuity a special education student needs. These are the challenges that face a special education teacher at the secondary level (Alley & Deshler, 1979).

School Environment

Exacerbating these problems is a kind of isolation for the special education staff that separates them from the rest of the staff (Chandler, 1983). Departmentalization of subject matter exists; consequently, teachers' offices and desks are grouped accordingly. Usually the classrooms are grouped in a similar manner with special education being set off by itself. Not only are some students perceived as strange by their peers, but some teachers avoid the special education area. One of the key moderators of teacher stress could be aid and support from peers or supervisors (Fimian, 1986). The teacher's relationship with the supervisory staff can either reduce or exacerbate teacher burnout in special education. Staff burnout can

be reduced by supervisors spending more time in planning, organizing, and advocating for staff according to findings and anecdotal information provided by observers (Cherniss, 1988). Less burnout of teachers occurs if administrators allow teachers "to do their own thing."

Mainstreaming proves difficult for teachers, since they may have to modify their instructional plan and delivery. The addition of a resource teacher is viewed as an imposition or intrusion by some regular class teachers. The special education teacher may be viewed as an outsider, or an annoyance the regular education teacher must cope with, in addition to special students being in their classes (Chandler, 1983). It is the special education teacher's responsibility to bridge the gap between regular and special education and make content area teachers develop a sensitivity to the needs of special education students. Failure to sell the learning disabilities concept so that regular education teachers are willing to make needed modifications can result in frustration and feelings of failure to ones students and in ones interpersonal relationship skills (Lerner, 1985).

A connection between juvenile delinquency and learning disabilities appears to exist (Lerner, 1985). Gang activity and violence are on the rise on high school campuses. Due to their low self-esteem, many special

education students find this kind of membership attractive and fulfilling. Guns, knives, and physical violence are the accepted forms of conflict resolution for this element. Since many of our students have probation officers, they are no strangers to problems with law and authority. Because of this attitude and incidents that have occurred, a workplace that was once considered safe, now may be deadly for both students and teachers (Bensky et al., 1980).

A difference exists between the problems encountered by elementary special education teachers and secondary special education teachers (Alley & Deshler, 1979). There is a uniqueness to the problems that exist in special education in California versus special education in Utah. Beasley et al., (1983) indicated that no noticeable difference exists between regular education and special education teachers' stress and burnout. The purpose of this project is to examine the differences in environmental stress factors for special and regular education teachers and to determine whether differences do exist and, if so, why.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Special education teachers experience environmental stress factors more intensely than regular education teachers, due to factors specific to the profession. In this chapter, it is the researcher's intention to set forth the procedures for questioning teachers, collecting data, and analyzing data received from within a high school district. The results obtained will help determine if a difference does indeed exist between regular and special education stress and burnout factors.

Universe and Sample

The sample of teachers to be surveyed will include all of those teaching in special education in a local high school district and a like number of regular education teachers to be randomly selected. The survey will be given in May, 1992. It will be conducted with the assistance of the special education department chairpersons at the various schools. An incentive to the chairpersons involved for complete questionnaire return will be a drawing for a \$35 gift certificate for dinner at an area restaurant.

Tools and Instruments

Two questionnaires will be used (Appendixes A & B). Both were developed by Beasley et al., (1983), whose study indicated no significant differences in stress and burnout by regular and special education teachers. The first, a questionnaire with minor modifications, includes demographic data and related job information. The second, The Environmental Stress Survey, includes sixteen statements to be rated and an open-ended question asking teachers to suggest ways stress could be reduced in the work environment.

Data Collection

The surveys for the district will be distributed at a special education department chairpersons meeting, completed at each school, and returned to the researcher by the chairperson via the district mail.

Data Analysis

Responses from the demographic and job related questionnaire and the Environmental Stress Survey will be compared between regular and special education teachers to determine (1) the extent of stress and burnout, (2) environmental factors involved, and (3) teachers' views on feasible ways to reduce stress. Item analysis from responses of special education and regular education will

be compared for differences utilizing the T test per item.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When given the same Environmental Stress Survey (Beasley et al., 1983), it would be expected that high school special education teachers due to the differences that exist between regular and special education would score differently as a group due to the inherent stress of their job. This research compared the responses of 132 teachers (71 regular education and 61 special education) in the East Side Union High School District.

The demographic information received from the teachers in spring, 1992 is presented in Table 1. As discussed earlier, women tend to enter special education due to their nurturing and care-giving nature. The number of males working as special education teachers is noteworthy. Male role models for special education male students is very important. Considering 72% of the special education population are male students (Lerner, 1985), only 26% of the special education teachers who responded were males. Whereas, 55% of the responding regular education teachers were males.

Special education teachers, as a whole, are younger, but are working with older mainstream (regular education) teachers. This can pose a problem when trying to

TABLE 1

Demographic Data of Sample

			<u>Total Sample</u>		<u>Regular Education Teachers</u>		<u>Special Education Teachers</u>	
			<u>N = 132</u>		<u>N = 71</u>		<u>N = 61</u>	
			<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>
Sex :	Male		42	55	55	39	26	16
	Female		55	73	41	29	72	44
Age:	21-30	years	11	15	8	6	15	9
	31-40	years	31	41	24	17	39	24
	41-50	years	41	54	45	32	36	22
	51-60	years	16	21	23	16	8	5
	60 +	years	1	1	0	0	2	1
Years Teaching :								
	1-3		15	20	14	10	16	10
	4-6		11	15	3	2	21	13
	7-9		11	14	8	6	13	8
	10-12		13	17	11	8	15	9
	12 +		49	65	62	44	34	21

Type of Students Serviced :

Regular (nonhandicapped) 54 71

Special Education	46	61
Mentally handicapped	7	4
Learning Disabled (LD)	84	51
Behaviorally / emotionally handicapped (BEH)	2	1
BEH / LD	3	2
Speech / language impaired	2	1
Other	3	2

integrate special education students into those classes where teachers have not had the training in mainstreaming, or hold the old traditional views of "tracking."

High is the number of teachers who have taught 12+ years and are still in special education. Unfortunately, the survey did not allow for identification of employment for 12+ prior years. Although if researched further, the question may be answered by women's re-entry into the teaching profession after childrearing or possibly after experiencing a divorce. Again, since such a demand exists for special education teachers, this is a field easily entered into to gain employment.

Table 2 has information regarding job-related data. Special education teachers do have a reduced student load overall compared to regular education teachers. Direct contact with students per hour is higher for regular education, but special education teachers consult, monitor, and document student progress during resource time. Time working on school related tasks appear to be comparable for both groups.

The area of role definition is somewhat a problem for special education teachers. Keeping up to date with changing rules and regulations in order to be in

Table 2

Job-Related Data

	<u>Regular Education</u>		<u>Special Education</u>	
	<u>Teachers</u>		<u>Teachers</u>	
	<u>n=71</u>		<u>n=61</u>	
Student load per day:				
<12	1% (1)		11% (7)	
12-15	-		5% (3)	
16-20	1% (1)		10% (6)	
21-35	20% (14)		26% (16)	
35+	77% (55)		46% (28)	
Direct contact with students (hours):				
1-3	3% (2)		8% (5)	
3-4	7% (5)		8% (5)	
4-6	49% (35)		69% (42)	
6+	41% (29)		15% (9)	
Time working on school-related tasks after school hours:				
1-3	61% (43)		66% (40)	
3-4	23% (16)		25% (15)	
4-6	6% (4)		2% (1)	
6+	6% (4)		5% (3)	
Role clearly defined with set expectations:				
Yes	76% (54)		62% (38)	
No	20% (14)		38% (23)	
Others' perception of my role matches with my own perceptions:				
Yes	49% (35)		43% (26)	
No	41% (29)		51% (31)	
Time spent away from students each day (minutes):				
<15	7% (5)		10% (6)	
15-30	15% (11)		16% (10)	
30-60	23% (16)		31% (19)	
Over 60	41% (29)		36% (22)	
Time engaged in physical exercise (days per week):				
None	13% (9)		20% (12)	
1-2	25% (18)		30% (18)	
3-5	48% (34)		39% (24)	
6-7	13% (9)		11% (7)	
Time engaged in physical exercise (minutes):				
None	8% (6)		15% (9)	
5-20	15% (11)		10% (6)	
20-30	24% (17)		26% (16)	
30+	51% (36)		44% (27)	

compliance with federal, state, local SELPA, and district standards in order to effectively do the job causes major frustrations. The high school special education model is different from the elementary school model, although people in positions of authority tend to treat them the same. Resource teachers who at times are not welcome into some regular teacher's classrooms contribute to that lack of match between other's perception of the special education teacher's role and the teacher's perception of that role.

Time spent away from students each day and time engaged in physical exercise appear to be somewhat the same for regular and special education teachers.

Table 3 contains the T-scores of the levels of significance of responses of regular education and special education teachers on the 16 statements on the Environmental Stress Survey (Beasley et al., 1983). For a .05 level of significance, it required at T(6) + or - 2.45 or greater. The following statements were significant: statement 3 (The paperwork required by the district, state, and federal governments contributes to my stress), statement 8 (Ambiguous policies from the administration contribute to my stress), and statement 9

Table 3

T Scores of Levels of Significance for Regular and
Special Education Responses on the Environmental Stress
Survey

<u>Statement</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>.05 (2.45)</u>	<u>.01 (3.71)</u>
1	.12	No	No
2	-1.29	No	No
3	-6.89	Yes	Yes
4	-.91	No	No
5	-.29	No	No
6	.40	No	No
7	-2.38	No	No
8	-2.58	Yes	No
9	-2.55	Yes	No
10	-1.50	No	No
11	1.33	No	No
12	-1.21	No	No
13	-1.41	No	No
14	-.48	No	No
15	.78	No	No
16	-2.11	No	No

(Lack of help and support from the administration contributes to my stress).

In order to reach a .01 level of significance at $T(6) + \text{or} - 3.71$ or larger is required. Only statement 3 dealing with excessive paperwork met that qualification.

Table 4 contains special education teacher suggestions of factors and ratings of other factors that contribute to teacher stress. These may include factors which the principal has no control over that were eliminated from the Environmental Stress Survey. The same numerical ratings of 0 (never contributes to my stress) to 6 (significantly contributes to my stress) were to be used for rating.

Contact was made with the personnel department of the East Side Union High School District concerning teacher movement in and out of special education within the District. It was suggested since records of that type were not kept, to survey each of the special education department chairpersons in order to obtain accurate information. A survey of department chairpersons was made comparing spring to fall of 1992, department movement. Responses were received from 8 schools with a combined total population of 61 special education teachers.

Table 4

Additional Teacher Suggestions of Environmental Factors
Which May Contribute to Special Education Teacher Stress

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Stress Rating</u>
1. "Sick Bldgs." - AC/heater have never worked properly since school opened 17 years ago	6
2. Cramped office space - 14 people expected to work in a room of less than 800 sq. ft.	6
3. Layout of school is not conducive for teachers' work needs (access difficult)	6
4. Photocopiers and computers needed - access is very limited	6
5. Unfair placement of teaching positions (No replacements for my Sped classes and that prevents me from being re-assigned.)	6
6. Writing IEP's on my own time is expected.	6
7. Lack of supplies & equipment necessary to teach students with special needs	6
8. Time - so many students require one-to-one assistance. Difficult to meet students needs.	6
9. Air quality in area.	6
10. Class disturbances	6
11. No/little support from psych services	6
12. Aides who are more trouble than the kids	6
13. Class size	6
14. Classroom environment - control heat, air condition, broken equipment, safety items	6
15. Small science room - not enough space for science labs, no equipment	6
16. Poor work facilities - overcrowded, lack of equipment, etc. (very depressing work environment)	6
17. Classroom conditions/heating, etc. It's usually too hot or too cold!	6
18. No office space to consult with students and test during prep period	6
19. Need to share classrooms, needing to move from classroom to classroom to teach	6
20. Lack of coordination of curriculum with mainstream departments in order to mainstream capable resource students	5
21. Elective areas are assigned by period and room # only after programs are scheduled	5
22. Prejudice against the mentally retarded	6
23. Money for books, supplies, etc.	4
24. Favoritism/Politics/Game playing	6

Table 4 (continued)

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Stress Rating</u>
25. The district hires teachers w/o sp. ed. credentials, and puts them into sp. ed. intern program and the other teachers (credentialed people) end up training them.	6
26. Accountability for rules & actions other teachers are not held to.	6
27. Classroom size: small	4
28. An occasional break from the routine (out early on Friday)	6
29. Length of period (4 wks, 2x/yr.) required for break time supervision	5
30. Constant interruptions during class times to tend to adm. or other requests.	5
31. Lack of aides during 1st per. class & fact that aides leave early, before class ends	5
32. Lack of help & support from the district	4
33. Administrators are so involved in P.R. and paperwork they do not really know what is going on in the classrooms. This can cause support problems, scheduling problems, policy problems.	4
34. Condition of classroom/heat & AC	4
35. Appropriate desks & broken furniture	4
36. Not having one classroom	5
37. Classroom too small	4
38. Air conditioning & heat not always working	3
39. Extra school meetings	*
40. Physical Space - too small. Students feel "crowded" & stressed without space, thus adding to teacher's stress	*

* = no rating

The following data represents combined totals received from the chairpersons' responses regarding movement of the special education staffs at each school: 5 teachers left special education, 1 teacher went to exclusively teaching regular education classes. The remaining 55 teachers involved in the survey appear to be still employed by the district.

In addition, 9 special education teachers also teach classes in regular education, and 14 teachers came into special education from teaching regular education classes. This unexpected movement into special education may be attributed to major budget problems encountered by most districts at this time. The potential number of teacher layoffs was substantial, so as a means of remaining employed by the District some teachers opted for teaching positions available in special education, an area where employment demand exists (as evidenced by the number of teachers who left special education and the increasing numbers of students requiring service. Consequently, the increase of 8 new teachers in special education for the fall semester, 1992.)

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY

The purpose of this research was to determine if there are stress or environmental factors that cause special education teachers to burnout and leave the profession at a higher rate than regular education teachers.

In spring, 1992, teachers in the East Side Union High School District were given a demographic questionnaire, a job-related questionnaire, and the Environmental Stress Survey. At the time of this research, all teachers were employed by the District. Any teacher who responded teaching a combination of both regular and special education classes were not used in the final data results.

Results

The demographic data yielded some interesting results in regards to the predominant sex (female) and age (younger as a whole) of teachers who work in special education. Also of note is the number of years of teaching experience (12+) of teachers working in special education.

Results of the job-related data seemed to hold no surprises. Special education teachers have a reduced student load and less contact with students due to the

consultative model of special education. Ambiguity regarding role definition appears to be more of a problem for special educators than those teaching in mainstream classes.

The Environmental Stress Survey results indicate a high level of significance occurring between regular education teachers and special education teachers when it comes to paperwork, ambiguous administrative policies, and unhelpful, non-supportive administrators. These do not have to be necessarily only school site personnel, but would also incorporate district office administrators.

Recommendations

Administrators both at the district office level and school site locations need to look very closely at their relationship with special education personnel.

Intervention programs, such as letting off steam, peer mentoring, conflict resolution, and in-service workshops (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990) might be ideas worth exploring and implementing at the district and school site levels.

People in charge also have the ability to deal with the human side of the person. Administrators can help and encourage job autonomy, organizational involvement, and help maintain a work environment where colleagues reinforce each other (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). How well

an administrator works with his staff, whether he treats them as individuals with worth and dignity or merely as part of the machine, will determine to a great extent the morale of the school (Ellenburg, 1972).

A network support system can alleviate sources of stress by providing the teacher with opportunities for professional development and personal growth (Taylor & Salend, 1983). "Special educators need to identify and utilize all available resources to their maximum potential. With a network in place rather than feeling they are fighting the battle alone, teachers can gain genuine comfort in the thought that 'We're all in this together'" (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990, p. 69).

Paperwork may be minimized by computerization, more standardization throughout the K-12 system, and eliminating duplication. Those setting policy need to realize the difference between elementary and secondary schools and update the forms used accordingly.

Future Research

Researchers should examine ways to reduce stress for teachers. One example would be looking at special education teachers teaching mainstream classes in order to stay in touch with reality. This would reduce isolation from mainstream teachers and also broaden the special education teacher's world with different

experiences because of the different student population serviced.

Performing a study over time to chart teacher movement within the district including entering and leaving the district would be beneficial to ascertain the direct reasons for the movement.

Conclusion

Results from the research were not conclusive. It is difficult, if not impossible, to get into people's minds. If this same survey were administered at a different time of the year, the results might be different, even when surveying the same people. Stress factors exist for all teachers. Handling those stressors is very individual.

Preventing burnout is not solely the responsibility of the teacher. Administrators, parents, and supervisors share in the success or failure of a teacher in preventing burnout (Weiskopf, 1980). Part of the problem in high school settings is the lack of "team"--the parts are there, but it does not function as in an elementary school setting. Overburdened program specialists, school psychologists, speech therapists, and teachers are so stretched time-wise, it is difficult to get assistance. Because of budget constraints in education, this might always be the problem unless a major overhaul of the

educational system takes place. In the open-ended responses (Table 4), the lack of support or interest from district and school site level administrators was frequently mentioned by responders as being an additional environmental factor contributing to stress. Wheeler et al., (1982) discovered this variable to be the most stressful to all groups of teachers, regardless of placement. No leadership, support, communication, or follow-up were noted as problems, as were disorganization and inconsistency on the part of administration.

Teachers must learn ways to protect themselves against stress. Exercise and diet are necessary elements. "A proactive approach of identifying effective stress-reduction strategies is far superior to a retroactive approach of trying to rekindle the fire of a burned-out teacher" (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990, p. 73). Three overall factors have been found to be important: "(1) commitment--the tendency to be involved in (rather than alienated from) many aspects of one's life; (2) challenge--the belief that change, rather than stability, is characteristic of life; and, (3) control--believing and acting as if one is influential (rather than helpless) in affecting the course of event in one's life" (Holt, Fine, & Tollefson, 1987, pp. 51-52).

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APPENDIXES

FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHER ATTRITION RATES:
SPECIAL EDUCATION VERSUS REGULAR EDUCATION

The following information will be used in a study to determine if special education teachers leave the profession at a higher rate, and if so, the reasons why as compared to their colleagues in regular education. Please take your time and give thoughtful answers. Your contribution is very much appreciated. Thank you.

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please circle the appropriate response.

Sex: Male
Female

Age: 21-30
31-40
41-50
51-60
60+years

Marital Status:
Single
Married
Separated
Divorced

A Single Income Household: Yes No

Dependents: Yes No Number

Years teaching: 1-3
4-6
7-9
10-12
12+

Do you teach: preschool elementary junior high
high school adults

Type of student serviced:

Regular (nonhandicapped)

Special education

Mentally handicapped

Learning disabled (LD)

Behaviorally/emotionally handicapped (BEH)

BEH/LD

Speech/language impaired

Other

JOB-RELATED QUESTIONNAIRE

Student load per day:

- <12
- 12-15
- 16-20
- 21-35
- 35+

Direct contact with students (hours):

1-3
3-4
4-6
6+

Time working on school-related tasks after school hours:

1-3

3-4

4-6

6+

Role clearly defined with set expectations: Yes No

Others' perception of my role matches with my own perceptions:

Time spent away from students each day (minutes):

- <15
- 15-30
- 30-60
- Over 60

Time engaged in physical exercise (days per week):

None
1-2
3-5
6-7

Time engaged in physical exercise (minutes):

None
5-20
20-30
30+

ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS SURVEY

Carol R. Beasley

The purpose of this survey is to discover which environmental factors are significantly contributing to teacher stress factors which the principal has no control over, such as size of class load, have been eliminated from the survey.

On the following page, there are 16 statements. Rate each statement from 0 to 6.

A rating of 0 indicates - this statement never contributes to your stress.

A rating of 1 indicates - this statement very mildly, rarely, contributes to your stress.

A rating of 2 indicates - this statement mildly, once in a while, contributes to my stress.

A rating between 3 and 5 indicates - this statement moderately contributes to your stress.

A rating of 6 indicates - this statement significantly contributes to my stress.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
(Never) does not	very mild		moderately			significantly

Rating
0-6

- (56) 1. _____ The lack of preparation time contributes to my stress.
- (57) 2. _____ The number of subject matter preparations contributes to my stress.
- (58) 3. _____ The paperwork required by the district, state and federal governments contributes to my stress.
- (59) 4. _____ The lack of parental support contributes to my stress.
- (60) 5. _____ Extra out-of-classroom duties contribute to my stress.
- (61) 6. _____ Lack of breaks from the classroom during the day contributes to my stress.
- (62) 7. _____ Ambiguous or unenforced school discipline standards contribute to my stress.
- (63) 8. _____ Ambiguous policies from the administration contribute to my stress.

0 (Never) does not	1 very mildly	2	3	4	5	6 significantly
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- (64) 9. _____ Lack of help and support from the administration contributes to my stress.
- (65) 10. _____ Lack of communication and clear direction contributes to my stress.
- (66) 11. _____ Lack of classroom help such as aides contribute to my stress.
- (67) 12. _____ Lack of cooperation from other teachers contribute to my stress.
- (68) 13. _____ Lack of classroom materials contribute to my stress.
- (69) 14. _____ Extra curricula activities which require my attendance contribute to my stress.
- (70) 15. _____ Lack of positive feedback from my principal contribute to my stress.
- (71) 16. _____ Lack of fitness programs at work is contributing to my inability to cope with other stressors.

Record and rate any additional environmental factors which may contribute to your stress. List only those that your principal has control over.

Rating	Statement
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____